United Nations A/62/PV.66

General Assembly
Sixty-second session

Official Records

66th plenary meeting
Tuesday, 11 December 2007, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Kerim ..... (The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting Devoted to the Follow-up to the Outcome of the Special Session on Children

Agenda item 66

(b) Follow-up to the outcome of the special session on children

Report of the Secretary-General (A/62/259)

Draft resolution (A/62/L.31)

The President: As members are aware, the Commemorative High-level Meeting will evaluate the progress made in the implementation of the Declaration and the Plan of Action contained in the final document of the special session of the General Assembly on children, entitled "A World Fit for Children" (resolution S-27/2, annex).

Ladies and gentlemen, and children from across the world, I welcome you all to this High-level Commemorative Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the follow-up to the special session on children. I was a delegate myself at that special session in 2002. When I returned this year, as President of the General Assembly, the session began with a video message from the children of my country. Why? Because there is nothing more important that the future of our children and young people. They are the next generations of leaders.

It gives me great confidence in this Organization when we tackle issues that cut to the core of that for which we stand, when we evaluate how well we have done, once declarations and plans of action are adopted and delegates return to their capitals.

We have a responsibility to set an example and stand up for what we believe in so as to ensure that we pass on to our children a better world, a safer, cleaner and more equal world.

Climate change draws these strands together. If we do not address this growing threat, instability will increase and the environment will deteriorate; the world's poor will be left struggling to build a better life for themselves and their children. Overcoming climate change requires a unique and continuous commitment. It means thinking ahead, and, at the same time, acting now. It requires an international resolve that captures the essence of the United Nations global mission.

We are already committed to these goals. At the 1990 Summit for Children, world leaders endorsed the principle that States should always act in the best interests of the child and that children should have a first call on resources. Again, in 2000, they committed to achieving specific targets by 2015 on children's education and health as part of the Millennium Development Goals. And in May 2002, at the General Assembly's special session on children, Governments promised to create a world fit for children as a bridge to a world fit for all of us. The General Assembly also devoted considerable attention to reviewing progress

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made in eliminating violence against children at its sixty-first and sixty-second sessions.

The year 2007 is a milestone for the world's children. It marks a rite of passage for the Convention on the Rights of the Child — its 18th birthday. Today and tomorrow, we have an opportunity to celebrate the important progress that has been made, but we also have a responsibility to achieve the goals we set for ourselves.

The Secretary-General's report offers a mixture of hope and concern about the situation of children around the world. I would like to commend all Member States — over 140 so far — that have submitted national reports on their progress towards the goals of the special session. These reports provide an assessment of the situation of children in each country, as well as future commitments to overcome the challenges that remain.

I would also like to commend the many regional bodies and civil society and private sector organisations, in particular, UNICEF and other United Nations agencies that have implemented initiatives to make the world fit for children. Unless the long-term investment in children is made, humanity's most fundamental long-term problems will remain unresolved. If we are serious about our collective promises, then we have a great responsibility to deliver on them for our children. As every parent knows, the worst crime is to mislead your child. Empty promises lead to empty souls.

I am optimistic that this plenary meeting, the round tables and the many side events will deepen our inter-generational dialogue as well as further our commitment to make the world a better place for all our children.

The Assembly will now hear a message, via video, by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon.

The Secretary-General: I am sorry I could not be with members for this meeting on the rights and well-being of children. I am in Bali for the United Nations Climate Change Conference, where we will also be addressing the needs of succeeding generations.

The special session on children in 2002 was truly special in many ways. It was the first devoted exclusively to children. It was the first to be attended by both children and heads of State or Government. It culminated in the adoption of a landmark document entitled "A World Fit for Children".

This new agenda was written for, and with, the world's children. It included 21 specific goals and targets for promoting healthy lives, providing quality education for all boys and girls, and protecting children from abuse, exploitation and HIV/AIDS.

At this year's Commemorative Meeting, I have the honour of presenting a new document entitled "Children and the Millennium Development Goals". It is my first comprehensive report on the MDGs as they relate specifically to children.

I am delighted that, once again, children and young people are joining the General Assembly. Some of them were involved five years ago, others are from a new generation helping to ensure that the nations of the world live up to the promises they made in 2002.

May these young people's engagement inspire you in your deliberations. Together, in Bali and in New York, let us work to make a lasting difference for succeeding generations.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Dalius Čekuolis, President of the Economic and Social Council.

Mr. Čekuolis (Lithuania), President of the Economic and Social Council: I have the honour to address the Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting Devoted to the Follow-up to the Outcome of the Special Session on Children. This meeting offers a unique opportunity to review how well we, as Member States, have worked with other partners to realize the goals in the Declaration and Plan of Action adopted at that twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly held in May 2002.

One of the clearest lessons over the last five years of striving to achieve welfare for children has been the importance of partnerships. Neither Governments nor non-governmental organizations, neither international organizations nor local communities can fulfil the needs of children by working in isolation. We have to collaborate and work together, even while we assume different responsibilities.

The Economic and Social Council has considered and is continuing to consider issues that are very much related to the world that we are building for our future. In the 2007 substantive session, Council member States

reflected on the theme of strengthening efforts to eradicate poverty and hunger, including through the global partnership for development. That topic encompasses two of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The Council considers that, as indicated in the report of the Secretary-General (A/62/259), since 2003, there have indeed been remarkable partnerships and collaborative efforts to accelerate action to achieve the Millennium Development Goals for the benefit of children. Significant progress has been made since the special session on children — in the promulgation of new and better laws, in the formulation and execution and more focused public policy and in realizing development outcomes for children. The adoption of strategic policy instruments and cost-effective essential services for children is also on the increase worldwide.

In the past five years, strong collaboration among international players, notably by special funds and agencies has yielded much fruit. I would like to express my appreciation for the work of the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health, the Roll Back Malaria Partnership and the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative for their efforts aimed at fighting HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, spreading education and eliminating violence and related crimes vis-à-vis children. I am also honoured to say warm words to the more than 3,000 non-governmental organizations that are accredited to the Economic and Social Council. A large number of them are active in building welfare for children worldwide. I thank them all for their partnership.

Yet, there are huge gaps in achievement: between difference regions of the world, at the country and provincial levels and in terms of gender. We will have to be firm in eliminating violence against children, combating HIV/AIDS and promoting education accessible to all. To some extent, problems faced by the world's children are rooted in inequality and injustice and a failure to extend to all children the rights and protections that are enjoyed by some. Running through all the patterns of injustice is the persistent reality of gender discrimination, which denies millions of girls equal rights to health and opportunities. It also renders them vulnerable to sexual and other forms of violence.

At the current session, the ten-year strategic review (A/62/228, part two) of the Machel study on armed conflict (A/51/306) reminded us of the changing and devastating impact of conflicts on children.

Regrettably, there are alarming indicators that overall official aid for children-related activities is dropping and that local economies have failed to provide full employment for their young people. The need for children to benefit directly from the development of new vaccines and advanced treatment for many childhood illnesses is obvious. Another major hazard for the years ahead is climate change. The scale of future global warming may be uncertain, but the process is already under way, threatening the prospects of millions of children.

As with climate change, globalization can sometimes lead us in unforeseen and dangerous directions. But it still holds the promise of new forms of progress and protection. Globalization is also associated with rapid technological change. For children, the potential benefits lie in information and communication technologies, which are unlocking vast stores of previously inaccessible human knowledge.

Collective efforts and renewed commitment are required to address the challenges of the future. The Economic and Social Council is committed to continuing to provide a forum not only to discuss the problems but also to share best practices in that respect. With the interest and cooperation that it receives from Member States, the Economic and Social Council has been seized of many challenges that we face in our countries. I am confident that we will pursue these issues vigorously to ensure a great future for children and to make the planet truly a world fit for children.

The President: I now give the floor to Ms. Ann Veneman, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund.

Ms. Veneman (United Nations Children's Fund): As I begin, I want to express our deep concern about the bombings in Algiers this morning and our sincere condolences to the families of those who have lost their lives or who have been injured.

It is an honour to participate in the Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting Devoted to the Follow-up to the Outcome of the Special Session on Children on this day, the day that marks the sixty-first anniversary of

the founding of UNICEF. We welcome the involvement of key partners, including the member organizations of the global movement for children, many other non-governmental organizations, sister United Nations agencies, academia, foundations and many more. Over 90 young people from around the world have been involved in shaping this special meeting, and they are making their voices heard.

In 2002, the General Assembly adopted the Declaration and Plan of Action entitled "A world fit for children" (resolution S/27-2). Governments committed themselves to a set of time-bound and specific goals and actions in four areas for the well-being of children: promoting healthy lives; providing quality education; protecting against abuse, exploitation and violence; and combating HIV and AIDS. Those commitments reaffirm and complement the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals as a framework for development.

We welcome the report (A/62/259) of the Secretary-General on children and the Millennium Development Goals, which was presented this morning. The report provides information and analysis on how far we have come, but also on how much further we need to go.

Progress is being made. For the first time since data have been collected globally, deaths of children under age 5 have dipped below 10 million, to 9.7 million. The rate of under-five mortality has declined 60 per cent since 1960. Community-based integrated health programmes have helped to drive progress — programmes that provide immunizations, vitamin-A supplementation, insecticide-treated mosquito nets and other key health and nutrition interventions. They also help to educate mothers on the importance of exclusive breast feeding and personal hygiene.

The data also indicate that HIV prevalence is declining in some sub-Saharan African countries, that more children, especially girls, are in primary school today than ever before, and that a growing number of children are registered at birth. Good and reliable data to monitor progress help to drive results. Measurable and sustainable outcomes based on the best available data are the foundation of UNICEF's approach in accelerating progress for children. Good data inform decisions about investment choices and priorities and about policies and programmes to deliver the optimal results, even with limited resources. When data are collected and analysed, targets are set, outcomes are measured and successful policies and programmes are scaled up, results and impact follow.

The 1990 World Summit for Children and the widespread adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child provided hope and renewed commitment and helped to drive progress and shape the agenda for children. Increasingly, there is a global culture that embraces children's rights as central to the advancement of humankind. The youngest members of society must be protected from violence, abuse and the worst forms of child labour. Last month, we marked the eighteenth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We all play a part in upholding the rights of, and achieving results for, children, with the Convention providing the framework and the Millennium Development Goals setting measurable benchmarks.

But if we are to create a world truly fit for children, we need to reach the millions of vulnerable girls and boys around the world whose lives continue to be impacted by poverty, hunger and abuse. That 9.7 million children die every year before their fifth birthday is simply unacceptable, especially since most of these deaths are from preventable causes such as disease and malnutrition. Worldwide, it is estimated that over 1 million boys and girls continue to be caught in the commercial sex trade and that hundreds of millions more have experienced some form of sexual violence. Many children suffer from violence at home, in their communities and in institutions. Over 90 million children continue to be out of primary school today. Each year, thousands of children are injured or killed by landmines or unexploded devices. Children continue to serve as soldiers in the conflicts of adults. And violence and rape are still weapons of war.

During a visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, I met women who had been brutally violated, including an orphaned girl. She was savagely beaten and raped by four men. She was 12 years old at the time. I often refer to that girl when I talk about the children I have met in my travels, because her story was so powerful and so painful — and all too common. These rapes must be stopped. We owe it to her and the thousands more like her who carry the physical and emotional scars — and who continue to be at risk.

In the coming months and years, starting with the reaffirmation of our commitments at this meeting, we

must intensify our efforts to address challenges and create healthy, safe and protective environments for children. In a message from the youth representatives delivered at the town hall meeting hosted by UNICEF yesterday, we were eloquently reminded of how we need to tap into each other's comparative strengths to get the best possible results. Young people are not the sources of the problems, we were told, but they are resources to help solve them.

As the 2015 deadline for reaching the Millennium Development Goals draws near, we need to approach our task with a collective sense of urgency. We owe it to the millions of girls and boys who continue to live on the margins of the world's progress. As UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador Audrey Hepburn once said, there is no deficit in human resources, only a deficit in human will.

The President: Members will recall that, in resolution 61/272, of 29 June 2007, it was decided that a girl and a boy would address the Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting at its closing meeting. However, in my letter to Member States of 6 December 2007, I proposed that one of the children speak at the opening meeting. If there is no objection, and without setting a precedent, I shall take it that the General Assembly agrees to hear a statement by a child delegate at this opening meeting.

It was so decided.

The President: I now give the floor to child delegate Longeni Matsi, a young gentleman from Namibia.

Mr. Matsi: My name is Longeni Victorious Matsi, and I am from Windhoek, Namibia. I have currently been working on a programme for children, made by children, on radio. It is called Uitani Childline Radio. We are discussing, we are educating and we are giving advice to children who are very strongly challenging the bad decisions that they confront. I am now going to read to the Assembly a text that has been prepared by all the children.

Ninety-three young people — 37 boys and 56 girls — aged 11 to 18 and representing 51 countries, despite our 20 different languages, are united for one cause: to create a world fit for children. Five years ago, children like us spoke for the first time in the General Assembly. They presented a document called "A world fit for us". Since then, we young people have been taking action to make that world: a world fit for us.

We have raised our voices and taken responsibility for those issues that directly impact us. We are becoming increasingly involved in forums and organizations, such as children's parliaments, which allow for a free environment for children to learn about their rights and express their opinions. We have fought for equality in all aspects of gender, age, ability, race and religion. We believe that our rights are universal — including for boys and girls, minority groups and indigenous peoples.

We undertake projects in our home countries that benefit a wide variety of children. We take various actions to combat issues such as malnutrition, child trafficking and HIV/AIDS, including in countries affected by disaster, conflict and war. We denounce all forms of child exploitation, violence and abuse against children. We need to establish and maintain those partnerships between young people and those who can ensure that rights are being enforced.

Promises were made in 2002, and we are eager to hear from you about what has been achieved and what still is needed to be achieved. This Meeting is a time for honesty, real action and meaningful change to end poverty and discrimination, to educate our children and to fight disease. This is the time for us to come together. This is the time to listen to our words not only with your ears but also with your hearts. There are no better people to consult on children's rights than children themselves. Together we can continue building a world fit for us.

The President: Before proceeding, I would like to draw the attention of the Assembly to a number of organizational matters pertaining to the conduct of the meeting.

First, with regard to the length of statements, in order to accommodate all the speakers inscribed on the list — and the list is very impressive, as I have 141 speakers inscribed on it — I urge speakers to adhere to the five-minute time limit for their statements, on the understanding that that would not preclude the distribution of more extensive texts. I appeal to speakers to cooperate in this respect.

Also, in order to assist speakers in managing their time, a light system has been installed at the speakers' rostrum, which functions as follows. A green light will

be activated at the start of a speaker's statement. An orange light will be activated 30 seconds before the end of the five minutes. A red light will be activated when the five-minute limit has elapsed.

Address by His Excellency Mr. Mirco Tomassoni, Captain Regent of the Republic of San Marino

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Mirco Tomassoni on behalf of the Captains Regent of the Republic of San Marino.

His Excellency Mr. Mirco Tomassoni, Captain Regent of the Republic of San Marino, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Mirco Tomassoni, Captain Regent of the Republic of San Marino, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

Captain Regent Tomassoni (*spoke in Italian; English text provided by the delegation*): First of all, the Republic of San Marino would like to express its concern regarding the tragic events of this morning in Algiers. We would like to associate ourselves with the expressions of grief for the victims in Algeria and the United Nations.

The Republic of San Marino, with the presence of its Captains Regent at this Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly Devoted to the Follow-up to the Outcome of the Special Session on Children, has intended to accept the invitation extended by the General Assembly to participate at the highest possible level, in the knowledge that this event is important in view of the examination and assessment of the outcome of our countries' activities vis-à-vis the principles and commitments set out in the Declaration and Plan of Action contained in the document entitled "A world fit for children", adopted at the twenty-seventh special session in 2002.

The Captains Regent most sincerely congratulate the United Nations on its hard work since then to affirm and defend children's rights through its bodies and specialized agencies, primarily the United Nations Children's Fund, which has undoubtedly achieved positive results. Indeed, the statistical data demonstrate the effectiveness of that work and give us a reason for hope for the future.

With regard to the fundamental principles stipulated 18 years ago in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and, subsequently, by the two Optional Protocols, there is still an urgent need for prompt and adequate responses in order to affirm the right of human beings to a dignified life, to a family, to education, to a healthy and harmonious development on the physical and intellectual levels, in a safe environment, without the threats that still jeopardize the lives of children and the integrity of their personalities in many parts of the world.

Children are still suffering the devastating effects today of conflicts that have, unfortunately, almost doubled over the past 10 years and in which they are even used as child soldiers and are subject to the most abhorrent forms of violence, abuse and exploitation. We must all consider such treatment as absolutely unacceptable.

For this reason, it is essential to spare no efforts in trying to overcome this intolerable situation, first within our national borders and, at the same time, by increasing our support to international cooperation and the development goals for all human beings, as established in the Millennium Declaration. Together with public institutions, volunteer associations also significantly contribute to the achievement of this goal. In our country, volunteers play a particularly important role in raising public awareness and involving the population in solidarity and development projects.

In San Marino, children constitute about 19 per cent of the population and effectively enjoy the rights provided for in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which have been integrated into the San Marino constitutional order and translated into a wide range of health, education, legal and cultural safeguards, from birth to 18 years of age. Nevertheless, new forms of malaise, discrimination and violence constantly threaten the growth and conscious development of children's and young people's personalities, including in the most economically and socially advanced societies. Constant attention must be paid to these phenomena.

Indeed, the comfort level achieved by these societies, including, indisputably, San Marino, as well as the rights ensured and the assistance provided, must not divert our attention from the dangers that indifference towards children and young people may

cause. In fact, adults often pay greater attention instead to the superficial aspects of existence. Young people left alone, without attention and straightforward educational guidelines and without ideals and spiritual values, are indeed easy prey for many destructive phenomena. We must, therefore, join our efforts in the fight against these phenomena, which increasingly constitute a further obstacle.

Indeed, over the years, the attention and commitment of States and organizations have progressively extended from the protection of children by adults to the full affirmation of children's specific rights. This implies that respect for children's identity goes hand in hand with respect for their cultural values and traditions, a sine qua non for building peace. This concept inspired the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World, which will end in 2010.

It is in this spirit that, last October, our country, after joining similar United Nations instruments, acceded to the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse. Moreover, after the adoption in recent years of a long series of legal measures in support of the family, San Marino is developing new legislation on international adoption and child protection in order to supplement and update existing legislation.

We believe that this special meeting and the exchange of experience and other contributions at the interactive round tables will provide a renewed momentum to our determination and will strengthen solidarity and cooperation for the protection of the rights of children and young people.

There is a strong link between the work of the General Assembly and this year's special events devoted to environmental threats, promoting dialogue and understanding among peoples and, finally, protecting children and young people, who should represent the best part of the present and our common hope for the future. Thus, the United Nations has demonstrated once again the timeliness and importance of its role in promoting dialogue and cooperation among all States.

We express our most heartfelt appreciation for this appeal and the momentum that it has created, bearing in mind that our participation in this important event will help to strengthen the solemn commitment undertaken by newly elected Captains Regent, who, upon their investiture every six months, pledge, in keeping with statutes dating back to the 1600s, to pay particular attention to the weakest groups in society and to protect children's rights.

The President: I thank the Captain Regent of the Republic of San Marino for his statement.

Mr. Mirco Tomassoni, Captain Regent of the Republic of San Marino, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Amadou Toumani Touré, President of the Republic of Mali

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Mali.

Mr. Amadou Toumani Touré, President of the Republic of Mali, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: I now invite His Excellency Mr. Amadou Toumani Touré, President of the Republic of Mali, to address the Assembly.

President Touré (*spoke in French*): I should like at the outset to express my heartfelt congratulations and thanks to His Excellency Mr. Srgjan Kerim, President of the General Assembly, and to all those who have contributed to the holding and, in particular, the good organization of this meeting to consider in depth the implementation of the resolutions of the special session on children, five years after the adoption of our common vision, "A world fit for children" (resolution S-27/2, annex).

I am particularly pleased to have been invited to this meeting because of the special, personal and affectionate relationships that I have with the children of Mali and with many other children throughout our continent. These children do not even call me by my full name, preferring a much more affectionate form: they call me by my initials, "A.T.T." These children, who give me their sincere friendship, call me their great friend.

I want to tell them, from this universal rostrum, that I, too, need their friendship. That friendship is a very great commitment, in the sense of the vision to which I have committed myself. Thus, I appreciate this meeting to review the process aimed at building a world fit for children — a process that is both visionary and based on the realities in our countries. In

particular, I hope that it will lead to results that will enable us to maintain a synergy of actions benefiting children.

The common African position adopted in Cairo in May 2001, "An Africa fit for children", which forms an integral part of the Plan of Action set out in "A world fit for children", was the object of a midterm review in Cairo five years later, from 29 October to 2 November 2007. The Conference of African Ministers responsible for Children, meeting on that occasion, adopted an appeal for accelerated action to ensure the survival, protection, development and participation of children for the period 2007-2012.

In that context, I should like to share with the Assembly a few lessons drawn from African experience. The status of the implementation of commitments for a world fit for children, in Africa and in Mali, has enabled us to make the following observations. There has been a substantial rise in school attendance rates, a strengthening of the capacities of public health facilities and an improvement in access to drinking water. With regard to the fight against HIV/AIDS, real progress has been made through increased awareness among our people, access to free anti-retroviral drugs in certain countries, such as Mali, and better care of AIDS orphans.

In the same spirit, thanks to the commitment of our heads of State and Government, greater attention has been accorded to protecting children in African countries from all forms of violence, abuse, negligence and exploitation and to shielding them from social vulnerability by strengthening the legal framework and through the promotion, ownership and defence of children's rights. We can also say that actions to combat child trafficking are now being carried out within the framework of the Economic Community of West African States and the Economic Community of Central African States, which together decided upon and signed a subregional agreement and agreed on a joint plan of action.

However, despite the progress made over the past five years in Africa, it must be recognized that children today are still vulnerable and increasingly affected by political, economic, cultural and social transformations and situations. The factors helping to worsen the situation of children on the continent and to jeopardize efforts to guarantee their protection, survival and development include poverty, conflicts, disasters, HIV/AIDS, abuse and child exploitation. Those are challenges that both States and the international community must overcome in order to offer children better chances in life.

We must renew our commitment to promoting the well-being of African children. We should be pleased that our States are increasingly aware of the fact that investing in children contributes to human development and economic growth as well as to peace and security. Some have said that one of the best ways to be generous now is to invest in the future. To invest in the future is to invest in children, who are both our present and our future.

In implementing these policies, we should place particular emphasis on participation, so as to promote the potential of children, adolescents and young people. Involving children in decisions that will affect their lives and the future of their communities and of society in general is essential in shaping the adults of tomorrow.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that Mali expects the draft declaration that we will be adopting here following this meeting (A/62/L.31) to live up to the commitments to which 69 heads of State or Government and 190 national high-level delegations subscribed in May 2002, in order to move together towards making the changes that we want to see for our children, in a spirit of international solidarity.

My dear friends the children, together we can build a world fit for children.

The President: I thank the President of Mali for his statement.

Mr. Amadou Toumani Touré, President of the Republic of Mali, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Jozefina Topalli, Speaker of the Assembly of the Republic of Albania.

Ms. Topalli (Albania): Allow me to join with others in offering my condolences regarding the tragic events in Algeria.

It is a special honour to participate in this extraordinary event. Over the past few decades, human rights and human development issues have become key aspects of international relations. Although the two areas have generally been treated separately, the need

to bring them together and to relate one to the other is becoming increasingly clear. Human rights — the set of principles that define and protect the human dignity of all people — are binding norms of behaviour for those States that subscribe to them. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a tool for advocacy that can be used to enhance human development and that gives people the ability to live healthy, creative lives as active members of their communities. Attention to these two related areas can change the lives of a country's most vulnerable citizens.

In Albania, one third of the population is under 18 years old, and 17 per cent of Albanians are between the ages of 15 and 24. Women in their reproductive years — from 15 to 49 years — comprise up to a quarter of the total Albanian population of 3 million.

The protection of children's rights has been one of the most important focuses of social policy development in Albania since 1992. The rationale for this shift in policy derives from the fundamental principles of the constitution of the Republic of Albania, United Nations conventions, the Stabilization and Association Agreement signed last year with the European Union and other international instruments ratified by the Albanian Government.

The protection of human rights in general and of children's rights in particular has been improved as a result of continuous legal and institutional reforms aimed at meeting European standards and achieving integration. The Albanian Government ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1992. In 2001, the first National Strategy for Children was approved. In June 2005, the National Strategy was revised, and the National Plan of Action for Children for 2005-2010 was approved.

We all know that parliamentarians or members of legislatures are key to the implementation of the General Assembly's Plan of Action (see resolution S-27/2, annex). In that regard, I would like to briefly present a few significant achievements and efforts made in recent years to fulfil all our commitments in these areas.

In order to ensure quality education for children, our Ministry of Education and Science increased the duration of compulsory education for children. The high school enrolment rate of students from ninth year classes is 80 per cent. To ensure teaching materials for pre-university education, an important and ongoing process, the budget was doubled in 2007. Educational funding increased from 3.1 to 4 per cent of gross national product, and investment in this field has tripled.

Universal access to basic education and the completion of primary education by the world's children is one of the most important of the Millennium Development Goals and of "A world fit for children". Overall, in Albania, about 92 per cent of primary-school-age children are attending primary school. There are no relevant differences between urban and rural areas: the figure is only 1.6 per cent higher in rural areas.

At the national level, there is no disparity between male and female primary school attendance. Furthermore, 91.2 per cent of children of primary school age — from 6 to 9 years — are attending primary school and 98.9 per cent of children of low secondary age — 10 to 13 years — are attending low secondary school. Sex differences in attending primary education are almost non-existent. A positive correlation between the level of a mother's education and household wealth may be observed. The percentage of children attending elementary school increases from 89.4 per cent to 96.8 per cent as the mother's education increases from primary to secondary and higher education.

With respect to literacy, the vast majority of the female population over the age of 15 in Albania is literate: 98.8 per cent. Literate women include those who are reported to read either easily or with difficulty. There is no significant difference between women from households in different economic categories — 98.6 per cent of women from the poorest families and 100 per cent of women from the richest families are literate.

With regard to health care, Albania presents an obligatory vaccine scheme against major preventable childhood diseases, namely diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, tuberculosis C, poliomyelitis, measles, mumps, haemophilius influenzae infections, hepatitis B and hepatitis. In 2006, mumps and haemophilius influenzae vaccines were introduced into the routine compulsory scheme. Vaccine coverage for 2006 for all vaccines was 98 per cent.

With regard to assistance at delivery of babies, the guidelines for good maternal health provide that all women should have access to basic maternity care

through a continuum of services offering quality antenatal care, clean and safe delivery and postpartum care for mother and infant, with a functioning referral system linking the whole. In Albania, the administrative figures reported by the Albanian Institute of Statistics show that in 2005 approximately 99 per cent of births were assisted by skilled personnel.

With respect to the promotion of good health in children, at the end of 2006, the Albanian parliament adopted a law against smoking in public places. This law prohibits smoking in schools, the sale of tobacco to children under 16 years of age, tobacco advertising at public events and sponsorship by tobacco companies of youth activities. The law entered into force on 27 May 2007 and was accompanied by a broad campaign with numerous public health inspections to ensure compliance.

The Albanian parliament recently adopted a specific law against violence in the family. We have also ratified a series of laws on children's rights, including, in particular, a law on the Republic of Albania's accession to the Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

With regard to children with limited abilities, the Albanian Government pays special attention to that group of society. It is for that the reason that we have tripled pensions for people with limited abilities. As a promoter of the implementation of the relevant law adopted by the Albanian parliament, I recently employed two youngsters belonging to that group.

A few days ago, we organized the Albanian parliament's day against family violence, a special high-level plenary session to combat domestic violence that included the participation of the Prime Minister, non-governmental organizations, diplomats and nearly 130 successful women representatives from various spheres, including the arts, culture, politics and civil society.

Two days ago, we opened a children's exhibition in our parliament building dedicated to combating domestic violence that included more than 200 child participants. I have brought with me some of their pictures, as well as genuine and heartfelt messages to the Assembly and to all of us. Please allow me to share with you the real message that Albania's children have sent to the General Assembly and the entire world: "Stop violence! Stop domestic violence!" That is the most sincere message that Albania's children can send to all parents, parliamentarians and people with power throughout the world.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. André Rouvoet, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Youth and Families of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Mr. Rouvoet (Netherlands): The more vulnerable people are the more they need legal protection. That is especially true of children. The international community must therefore not let up on its efforts to ensure that children enjoy their rights to proper nutrition, health care, education, sanitation and safe drinking water, as set out in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). That is why we are here. And that is why the Netherlands will work actively towards those Goals.

Last February, the new Dutch Government adopted youth and family issues as a priority in national policy. The policy programme under the theme "Every opportunity for every child" was explicitly based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

A recent UNICEF report ranked Dutch children as the happiest of 21 wealthy Western nations, followed by the children of Sweden and Denmark. We are grateful that children in the Netherlands are happy and contented with their lives. Eighty-five per cent of children in the Netherlands are doing well, but not everything is going well. Ten per cent of our children are at risk and 5 per cent have problems. They are neglected, kept out of school or even abused. They have criminal records and behavioural, alcohol or drug-related problems. They suffer from obesity, making them more likely to contract diseases.

As Minister for Youth and Families, it is my task to provide the positive conditions for children's development, so that the lives of the 85 per cent will remain happy and the lives of the other 15 per cent will be improved. We cannot do that only by investing in the young people in question. We also have to invest in their families.

In recent decades, policies aimed at family life have been somewhat neglected. We believe it is time

for the family to be fully recognized as the basic unit of society, and as such to be strengthened by the Government. A safe and healthy family life is of crucial importance for the well-being of children and of society as a whole. In other words, when the family flourishes society will flourish. I therefore want to set up easily accessible youth and family centres in every town in the Netherlands, where parents and young people can find help and advice close to home.

Of course, the Government ought to be reluctant to interfere in parenting matters. It is parents who are responsible for children's upbringing in the first place. If they cannot cope, and if the community fails to support them, professional care and assistance must be provided, primarily aimed at encouraging or empowering them to assume their responsibilities. But when, and only when, the development of the child is endangered, the Government has not only the right but also the duty to intervene. Interventions can range from forcing parents to accept help to — as a last resort — transferring the child to a foster family. We want children to grow up in a safe environment, to achieve their potential and to contribute to society, especially those coming from the most disadvantaged families. The Dutch Government recently introduced an additional income-related child allowance.

In international forums too, children's rights are a Dutch priority. We shall continue to lobby for such rights, especially the right to a proper education and the right to grow up in a safe environment, free from violence.

Mr. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro's study on violence against children (see A/61/299) will help the United Nations to better address difficult and sensitive issues such as corporal punishment, sexual abuse and the worst forms of child labour. I applaud the decision of the Third Committee (see A/C.3/62/L.24/Rev.1) to recommend the appointment of a special representative on violence against children. I can assure the Assembly that the Netherlands is only too happy to help other countries develop and introduce plans to combat violence against children.

We have actively lobbied within the European Union for the speedy adoption of the guidelines on children's rights, so that they will occupy a more prominent place in the Union's foreign policy. The General Affairs and External Relations Council adopted those guidelines yesterday.

The Netherlands is also involved in a number of bilateral initiatives. For instance, we will fund the translation of a child-friendly version of Mr. Pinheiro's study into the languages of countries willing to implement its recommendations. Moreover, the Netherlands will step up its efforts to combat child labour. It will pursue an integrated approach that combines political instruments with investment in education, poverty reduction and public campaigns.

Both the United Nations study on violence against women (A/61/122/Add.1) and the one on violence against children, both published in 2006, make it clear that girls are particularly vulnerable to all kinds of violence. We believe that more needs to be done to ensure that this particularly vulnerable group gets sufficient attention. The Netherlands has therefore decided to organize an international conference in 2009 on combating violence against children, particularly girls. We intend to do that in close cooperation with the United Nations. The aim will be to promote international action to stop violence against girls and to enhance the resilience of girls. I will make sure that the Assembly is informed in good time about the structure and organization of the conference.

Ms. Hepburn (Bahamas), Vice-President, took the Chair.

In 2002, the children's statement at the General Assembly's special session on Children ended with the following words: "You call us the future, but we are also the present" (A/S.27/PV.1, p. 9). That is why we need to take action now.

The central goal of the Dutch youth and family programme is to contribute to a country where children can grow up safe and healthy, develop their talents, enjoy themselves, learn to be good citizens and be properly equipped for the future. In essence, that is also the aim of the 2002 Declaration and Plan of Action (resolution S-27/2, annex). Only when we as international community reaffirm our commitment and reinforce our efforts will we be able to achieve our goal: a world fit for children.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Somsavat Lengsavad, Standing Deputy Prime Minister of Foreign Affairs and Chairman of the National Commission of Mothers and Children of the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

Mr. Lengsavad (Lao People's Democratic Republic): Over the past five years, although some considerable achievements have been registered on every target of the implementation of the Action Plan of A world fit for children, slow progress and challenges continue to persist. One of the main challenges currently faced by the least developed countries is the lack of financing in practical terms.

As far as the Lao People's Democratic Republic is concerned, our Government has given great importance and attention to the follow-up of the Plan of Action of "A world fit for children" by adopting methods and programmes in each area, which are being implemented with gradual success. Concerning the implementation of the right for child survival, our Government has accorded top priority to mothers' and children's health-care activities by placing immunization programmes as a key element for mainstreaming primary health-care activities and other activities related to mothers and children.

The Government has also organized an annual national immunization campaign for mothers and children with the incorporation of vitamin A supplements and de-worming procedures with a view to eliminating measles by 2012. Recently, this campaign was held on 9 November 2007 with the participation of the head of State and other high-ranking officials of the Government. Furthermore, our Government has set regulations on water quality control for ensuring clean water. In 2005, a total of 67 per cent of households had access to clean water.

On child development, our Government has placed education at the centre of this activity. In this context, the National Assembly has adopted laws and important measures such as the law on the protection of the rights and interests of children and the amended law on education. The implementation of our education strategy by 2020 and the National Plan of Action on Education for All have also been vigorously pursued. To provide wider access to education for children of all ethnicities throughout society, the Government has expanded ethnic schools and joint learning programmes involving both handicapped and non-handicapped children. So far, the net primary school enrolment ratio is 86.4 per cent.

On child protection activities, the Lao Government has fully implemented the principles and provisions of the Convention of the Rights of the Child by according greater importance to children's care and protection from various risks such as abuse, persecution, the use of forced labour and sexual exploitation. Moreover, my country has also become a party to International Labour Organization Conventions No. 138 and No. 182.

In addition, the Lao People's Democratic Republic is also a party to two Optional Protocols of the Convention of the Rights of the Child. Currently, the Government is formulating a national action plan on combating child trafficking and child sexual exploitation.

To promote children's participation, the Lao Government has created enabling conditions and opportunities for children and young people to take part in various social activities both inside the country and overseas to exchange views on issues of common concern. Furthermore, the Government has encouraged children and young people to foster cultural exchanges on the fine traditions of the nation and of our different ethnicities by educating them to preserve and transcend that common heritage while cultivating a decent and progressive lifestyle.

The Plan of Action of A world fit for children is widely recognized as a tool for realizing the Millennium Development Goals, especially the Goal related to the promotion and protection of children. Like other developing countries, the Lao People's Democratic Republic has achieved some significant progress in implementing this Action Plan, but poverty and lack of funds remain a major challenge.

To complement the efforts made by each developing country, I would therefore like to call upon the international community to exert more efforts in fulfilling their obligations through the allocation of 0.7 per cent of their gross national product as official development assistance to the developing countries.

I wish to reaffirm the Lao Government's steadfast commitment to collaborating with the world community for the cause of A world fit for children.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency The Honourable Constance Simelane, Deputy Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Swaziland.

Ms. Simelane (Swaziland): The Kingdom of Swaziland is classified as a lower-middle-income country with an estimated gross domestic product per capita of $1,500. However, 60 per cent of the

population lives below the poverty datum line, while 37 per cent lives in extreme poverty. The socio-economic profile of the country shows that we have been faced with HIV/AIDS, poverty and climatic change leading to drought and environmental degradation.

The 2006 draft census report estimates a population of 1 million people, of which approximately 50 per cent are children. There is also an increase in the number of child-headed households. Drought is another factor that has increased the risk for already vulnerable communities. Over 40 per cent of the people in Swaziland are now facing acute food and water shortages. Swaziland has embarked on programmes for the provision of grants to the elderly and children as well as farm inputs in an effort to cater for the poor.

These efforts are necessary to promote the physical, psychological, spiritual, social, emotional, cognitive and cultural development of children so we can create a Swaziland fit for children, a Swaziland striving progressively to attain the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The Swaziland Government, in an effort to harmonize domestic laws with the provisions and principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child has made amendments on certain pieces of legislation. These amendments include the adoption of the Constitution Act of 2005 as the supreme law of the land, a number of provisions of which deal with protecting and promoting the rights of the child; the amendment of the Criminal Procedure and Evidence Act, which has facilitated the establishment of the intermediary service and Children's Court; the commissioning by the Government of Swaziland of the drafting of the Children's Act and Child Justice Bill; the development in 2007 of Ministry of Health and Social Welfare guidelines and standards for the operation of orphanages and for children living in institutions or homes; and the establishment of a special unit within the Ministry of Justice with 14 prosecutors to deal with child abuse and domestic violence cases.

The Government has also established institutions to address children's issues at various levels. The National Children's Coordinating Unit was established under the Deputy Prime Minister's Office. This unit seeks to ensure that children are protected from all forms of abuse, and that they are supported and raised without discrimination. The Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Children's Affairs was established in 2007 to support legislation on child protection. A Domestic Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offenses Unit was created within the Royal Swaziland Police. A Children's Court was also established within the High Court of Swaziland. A Children's Centre of Clinical Excellence — a special health facility for children infected with HIV — was established in 2005.

In addition to constitutional and legislative protection, we have implemented national policies aimed at improving the welfare and quality of life for children in Swaziland. These policies include a National Health Policy launched in August 2007, together with a National Strategy Plan, a comprehensive multi-year immunization plan for 2007-2011 now under development; the Poverty Reduction Strategy and Action Plan that was approved by the cabinet in 2006; and a National Policy for Children, including Orphaned and Vulnerable Children.

The National Plan of Action for Orphaned and Vulnerable Children was launched in April 2006. All relevant stakeholders were included in the development process, and the planned interventions focused on a child's right to protection, participation, food, basic services and education. The Plan seeks to ensure that children have access to shelter, education, water, food and protection from abuse, violence, exploitation, discrimination, trafficking and loss of inheritance.

The Government of Swaziland has launched SwaziInfo, an adapted version of DevInfo, as a national monitoring tool for following progress on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other national priorities. Various programmes have been undertaken to track MDG targets.

Although HIV prevalence had dramatically increased over the years, it began to show a decline in 2006. The number of children living with HIV thanks to antiretroviral therapy is now increasing. In 2006, a total of 1,135 children living with HIV/AIDS were on antiretrovirals, and services to help prevent mother-to-child transmission expanded. In addition, quality family planning services were integrated in most sites. Neighbourhood Care Points are providing care, support and at least one meal a day to approximately 33,000 orphaned and vulnerable children.

The Tinkhundla Fit for Children initiative, a localized and adapted version of the "A world fit for children", has been in place in Swaziland since 2005. The initiative is rooted in the Swazi culture that requires communities and families to support and care for all children in one way or another.

Other legal initiatives include the a draft sexual offenses working document, which is designed to curb the sexual abuse and exploitation of children. The Ministry of Labour is engaged in a project on the elimination of the worst forms of child labour. The project seeks to examine the extent of the problem of child labour in Swaziland and find ways to combat it. A Programme Advisory Committee on Child Labour, a multisectoral body established to coordinate issues relating to child labour, has been established.

I would like to conclude by mentioning that the establishment of the new National Children's Coordination Unit, the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Children's Affairs and continued strong collaboration between the Government and civil society, United Nations agencies and other donors provide for an opportunity for improved advocacy and coordination for children's issues and a coordinated response. The year 2008 will focus on working towards ensuring the domestic application of international conventions that we have ratified, through dissemination efforts, implementation and monitoring of the recommendations of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We will also stress continued advocacy to ensure that draft policies, bills and guidelines are translated and passed into legislation.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Natalia Petkevich, Deputy Head of the Administration of the President of Belarus.

Ms. Petkevich (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): All children of the world cry in the same language. In that respect, they are absolutely the same. But at the same time, they are very different. Children are the mirror of the State. The way children are treated determines the moral state of society and the level of development of a State.

The Republic of Belarus was the first country in the post-Soviet State back in 1993 to adopt the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The recommendations of "A world fit for children" (resolution S-27/2, annex) have been enshrined in our national strategy to improve the situation of children. It is significant that in the preparation of the strategy children themselves took part and they said what they wanted at the national and regional forums.

Starting in 1998, we have gradually been implementing the presidential programme entitled "The children of Belarus". The State provides care for all categories of children — healthy children, sick children, those that have parents, those who are orphans. Special State support is provided for talented young children.

We are particularly pleased that, since 2004 the trend in Belarus has been for an increased birthrate. There are more and more families with three or more children: a graphic reflection of our State policy to provide support for mothers and children, particularly for families with many children.

Belarus is among the countries with low infant and child mortality. For the last 10 years, the infant mortality rate in Belarus has decreased by half and is at the lowest level within the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Vaccination coverage is 99.2 per cent. Up to the age of two years, children are given free food. All children receive free secondary schooling. Eighty-two per cent of children study in free schools. There is a special category of children in Belarus, the children of Chernobyl, who were born and who live in areas affected by the Chernobyl disaster. They are provided with special medical observation, annual clinical examinations, free meals in school, free boarding and treatment in health centres and sanitariums.

We are doing everything we can to ensure a barrier-free environment for children with special psycho-physical development needs. In order to achieve this we have drastically changed the approach to educating and raising such children. Instead of specialized boarding schools, we have introduced integrated education structures which allow for these children to live with their own families and to receive education together with ordinary children.

The existence of orphans is a great cause of distress for any State. The main task is to give them a new family or help them find a new home. Today in Belarus about 75 per cent of those children receive some form of family care, though that figure reaches 100 per cent in some regions of the country.

But social orphanhood is a more important problem. The phenomenon of "orphans" that have living parents is a disgrace to modern society. For that reason such children receive State support, and their so-called parents can be held responsible under the law, even criminal law.

There is another problem that deserves serious attention. As is known, the Republic of Belarus is actively promoting an initiative to improve coordination of international actions to prevent human trafficking. Especially alarming are the crimes that involve the trade in children and child pornography. The production of child pornography and its distribution on the Internet are occurring on a truly terrifying scale. We firmly believe that the General Assembly must definitely discuss the problem of combating the trafficking in children in the very near future as one of its thematic debates.

Today's meeting of the General Assembly is deeply symbolic for the Republic of Belarus because this year was proclaimed in our country as the Year of the Child. We must do everything we can to see to it that in all countries of the world the situation of children is constantly and very significantly improved. That will undoubtedly be helped by strengthening existing and creating new partnerships at the global, regional and national levels.

Accordingly, we welcome the fact that UNICEF bases its strategy for protecting children and improving their status on the premise of the "trinity of partners" — Member States, international organizations and civil society. In twenty-first century we must put an end to the shame of modern civilization — trafficking in children and their involvement in military conflicts. The Interagency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons should play a leading role in that process.

Children are our future. What world our children grow up in, in what they see around them and in what conditions their understanding of the world is formed will determine ultimately the future of our States and of the whole of humankind.

Let us unite our efforts to form a world not just fit for children. Let us build a world worthy of children and worthy of their future.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Svetlana Inamova, Deputy Prime Minister of Uzbekistan.

Mrs. Inamova (Uzbekistan) (*spoke in Russian*): Allow me, on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan, to express sincere gratitude to the initiators and to the organizers of this very important event to assess progress made in implementing the declaration and plan of action contained in the document entitled, "A world fit for children". The Republic of Uzbekistan fully supports those documents and is making every effort consistently to implement the tasks contained in them.

In Uzbekistan, the protection of motherhood and childhood and the creation of conditions for comprehensive, harmonious development and education of children are intrinsic parts of our State policy. Uzbekistan ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in December 1992, and is purposefully working to implement the provisions of A world fit for children. In particular, we have worked out a strategy, priorities, national development goals and appropriate plans of action, as well as a system of protecting the interests of children, all of which have been modernized in accordance with the provisions of the document. We are focusing on the prosperity of children as a priority in our strategy for increasing the prosperity of Uzbekistan for the period 2007 to 2010. Together with UNICEF, we have worked out and are implementing a system of monitoring of prosperity goals for children. The main thrust of all of those plans of action is to improve the prosperity of children. The plans are clearly targeted to achieve success in implementing A world fit for children.

I would like to take this opportunity to draw the Assembly's attention to the efforts we are making in Uzbekistan for the prosperity of children in order to build a world fit for a happy, harmonious life for our children. A solid system of legislation has been established to protect the rights of children. In all legislative acts we have reflected the principle of keeping the child's best interests in mind. Most of the more than 90 normative legal documents relating to social protection include the rights of the child.

This year, we adopted a law guaranteeing the rights of children, which was prepared with the active support of experts from UNICEF. The rights of children have been enshrined in Government

programmes, such as the State programme to reform the public health system, the national training programme and the State nationwide programme to develop education for 2004-2009.

In Uzbekistan, there are more than 5,000 active non-governmental organizations (NGOs), most of which deal with the problems of children, including the international non-governmental charity fund entitled, "For a healthy generation" and a non-governmental children's fund called, "You are not alone". Because of the variety of tasks involved that aim to guarantee the comprehensive interests of children, and also given the need for coordinated action by all NGOs in the Republic that deal with the problems of children, about 100 NGOs have set up a coalition to provide assistance for the protection of the rights and interests of children. In 2006, the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan set up a coordinating board for the prosperity of children that includes senior officials from ministries, departments, voluntary organizations and international organizations.

The Republic is implementing measures to ensure the birth and education of healthy children beginning with the formation of a healthy young family. All medical services for children are provided free of charge. A great deal of work is being done under the programme entitled, "Mother and child screening", which seeks to prevent the birth of children with congenital diseases involving mental impairment, as well as the screening of pregnant women to detect fetal abnormalities. We are cooperating with the World Health Organization, UNICEF, the United Nations Population Fund, the United States Agency for International Development, the Japan International Cooperation Agency, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and other partners to implement the mother and child protection programme, in particular the Universal Immunization Programme, the Health and Family Life Education Programme, the Integrated Management of Childhood Illness, the improvement of reproductive health and prevention of iron and iodine deficiencies among others. In 2003, a joint UNICEF-JICA programme was started to prevent mother and child anaemia. That programme covers some 2.5 million children. We have also started planning a national flour fortification programme. In recent years, there has been a significant drop in maternal, infant and child mortality in our Republic. We are carrying out a strategic anti-HIV/AIDS programme for 2003-2006, and we have developed a new State programme for 2007-2011.

Particular attention is devoted to social programmes. Several important State programmes and decrees are in place on themes such as the family, a healthy generation, mother and child, ecology, motherhood and childhood and goodness and compassion.

Upon the initiative of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, 2007 was proclaimed a Year of Social Protection in Uzbekistan. The Government of our Republic has confirmed a State social protection programme within which measures have been taken for further improvement of the situation of children, giving them all-around support and strengthening the legal mechanisms that protect their rights. Fifty-three per cent of the State budget is devoted to social programmes. At 99 per cent, our literacy level is among the highest in the world.

The amount of money from our budget that we spend on education has increased by a factor of 2.6. Over the past three years, we have built more than 250 new schools in Uzbekistan. We are planning to build more than 100 middle schools and 900 vocational colleges. This will make it possible to fully make the transition to a compulsory 12-year education programme. There are 90 specialized pre-schools for children, and we want to have an inclusive education.

We have established some special State awards for talented children in spheres such as literature, art, culture, education and science. We have a children's sport fund, which is headed by President Karimov. More than 400 sports schools are functioning, together with a Special Olympics Organization. In 2007, Uzbekistan held a Special Olympics for countries of Central Asia, Poland, Afghanistan, Turkey and the Russian Federation. More than 450 mentally challenged children took part in those games.

In conclusion, I assure the Assembly that Uzbekistan will continue to make every effort towards the consistent implementation of the Declaration and Plan of Action contained in "A world fit for children".

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency The Honourable Alima Mahama, Minister for Women and Children's Affairs of Ghana.

Ms. Mahama (Ghana): I extend my condolences to the Government and the people of Algeria regarding the tragic events that occurred in Algiers today.

I am honoured and privileged to deliver this address on behalf of His Excellency President John Agyekum Kufuor, Chairman of the African Union (AU) and President of the Republic of Ghana, who, as current AU Chair, was mandated by the second Pan-African Forum on Children, held in Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt, to present to the Assembly our call for accelerated action on the implementation of the Plan of Action on an Africa Fit for Children.

I am pleased to report that Africa has prepared for today's Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting. As part of our preparations, we met in Cairo, under the sponsorship of the African Union Commission and with the collaboration of the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt. I am pleased to report that the meeting noted a number of significant achievements and much progress made in all of our countries in the promotion of child survival, protection, development and participation.

For instance, accelerated programmes for child survival and the adoption of social security measures for vulnerable groups has helped to reduce infant mortality and to enhance the life chances of children in several countries. Awareness of HIV/AIDS prevention is high, and preventive measures have been intensified. Mother-to-child transmission has been reduced by 25 per cent in several countries. In the area of protection, there is greater awareness and recognition of various forms of abuse, exploitation and violence against children. Many countries have passed laws against child trafficking and other harmful practices, as well as instituting juvenile justice systems to protect children.

Much as we were pleased to record some measurable progress for our children, the Cairo review meeting was also concerned that the targets set in the Plans of Action for an Africa fit for children and a world fit for children are yet to be attained. The meeting identified a number of challenges. These include the gaps between policy and practice; high levels of absolute poverty; very high levels of neonatal mortality; persistent malnutrition among our children; low school completion and high drop-out rates; involvement of children in armed conflict; and low participation of children and youth at all levels.

In the light of the slow progress and challenges, AU member States, represented by their ministers, as well as civil society and all children's representatives, strongly reaffirmed Africa's commitment to redouble its efforts to achieve the target of the Plans of Action of an Africa fit for children and a world fit for children. We have committed ourselves to priority areas, including legislative policy and institutional development, mobilizing and leveraging resources, enhancing children's life chances, overcoming HIV/AIDS, realizing the right to education, protection and participation, as well as establishing monitoring and evaluation measures to monitor our activities and outcomes.

There is a side event at 1.15 p.m. today in the Economic and Social Council Chamber, and I invite representatives to participate so that we can elaborate on the call for accelerated action. Time will not allow me to spell out the details of the call, but permit me to highlight just a few.

We committed ourselves to accelerate legal reform; allocate sufficient budgetary resources for our children; scale up minimum packages of proven childhood interventions based on successful strategies such as the accelerated child survival and development programme; support family-based and community-based actions that enhance children's wellbeing; scale up universal access to HIV/AIDS prevention; scale up programmes for prevention of mother-to-child transmission; ensure universal access to comprehensive basic education, especially early childhood care and other pre-school programmes; create a safe and enabling environment for our children's participation; and promote and implement multisectoral programmes to end violence on the continent.

I am happy to inform the Assembly that at the Pan-African Forum in Cairo, the First Lady of Egypt, Her Excellency Mrs. Suzanne Mubarak, launched a fervent appeal to all African countries to end female genital mutilation. The ministers of Africa responsible for child rights and welfare accepted and endorsed the appeal and committed themselves to take steps accordingly as a matter of urgency.

Please allow me to share a bit of Ghana's experience. Ghana's achievements in the area of early childhood development, child health and progress towards universal school enrolment are success stories

that we would be proud to share in the course of the present meetings, round tables and side events.

Through the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs, we have established a centralized management and coordination system for the effective implementation of our early childhood development policy, and we have established national, regional and district level bodies to promote and monitor implementation of these programmes.

Prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS is an integral part of the national antenatal care and delivery programme, with free health care service coverage for pregnant women and children below 18 years once they have registered under the national health insurance scheme. Annual national campaigns on integrated child and maternal health, comprising immunization, distribution of free insecticide-treated bed nets and vitamin A supplementation have been institutionalized, and I am happy to announce that no child in Ghana has died from measles in the last four years. We are also on course to be certified as a polio-free country.

Ghana has enacted many legislative tools, including a human trafficking law and has developed a comprehensive national plan of action to implement the law. A cross-sectoral Human Trafficking Management Board and a Human Trafficking Fund have been established, and we have multilateral and bilateral cooperation agreements with neighbouring countries to effectively combat trafficking.

Having conducted research on violence against children, we have started the process towards developing a national plan of action on violence against children. On this note, permit me to congratulate the United Nations and its Member States for the great achievement of having decided to establish the post of Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children.

Africa hereby reaffirms our commitment to achieving the targets of the various plans of action. In this regard, we are gratified that this high-level meeting includes children from around the world, including Africa: we have brought children as members of our teams. We hear their voices in the children's forum. This meeting is about them and therefore must include them. We congratulate all the children for their commitment to make the world better fit for them.

On behalf of the current Chairman of the African Union, His Excellency President John Agyekum Kufuor, I present to this High-level Plenary Meeting the African position paper on a call for accelerated action on the implementation of the Plan of Action towards an Africa Fit for Children 2008-2012.

Ms. Bethel (Bahamas), Vice-President, took the Chair.

While acknowledging the kind support of the international community, UNICEF and all our development partners, we invite the Assembly to join us to effectively respond to that call. Africa's children cannot wait. At the Cairo meeting our children said, "No more resolutions without solutions".

The Acting President: I now give the floor to The Honourable Claire Hepburn, Senator, Attorney-General and Minister of Legal Affairs of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas.

Ms. Hepburn (Bahamas): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the 14 States members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

We assemble here over the next two days clearly to assess the vital goals we made in 2002 and the progress achieved in advancing the well-being and development of children, as set out in the Declaration and Plan of Action "A world fit for children" (resolution S-27/2, annex), adopted at the twenty-seventh special session, on children. The States members of CARICOM welcome this opportunity and reaffirm our commitment and support for the full implementation of the Declaration and Plan of Action. We also extend our support to the ongoing efforts of the United Nations and its funds, programmes and agencies in the protection and promotion of the rights of children.

We commend the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and note the proposed appointment of a Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children. Although some of the recommendations of the study on violence against children (A/61/299) may not be in concert with traditional practices and customs of rearing children and may be interpreted as usurping parental authority, nevertheless, we pledge our support for that appointment and for the mandate.

We are often in danger of trivializing the truism that children are the most important asset to the future development and survival of our planet. As the Plan of Action of the World Summit for Children, adopted on 30 September 1990, states,

> "There is no cause which merits a higher priority than the protection and development of children, on whom the survival, stability and advancement of all nations — and, indeed, of human civilization — depends". (*A/45/625, annex, p. 19*)

Seventeen years later, continuing abuses make this fact an even greater imperative for action. It is, indeed, important to record the positive side of the ledger. However the ledger will only be truly balanced when the negative side reflects that no child in any country is emotionally or physically harmed or is disadvantaged.

In terms of the positive side of the ledger, we can be justly proud of the fact that the concept of children's rights, based on this Organization's near unanimous ratification of the landmark Convention on the Rights of the Child, has had an enormous impact and has catapulted children's issues to the forefront of every agenda and major debate of this Assembly.

The dawn of the new millennium in 2000 saw the world community pledge its commitment, through the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals, to bring hope for a better and more equitable world to millions of the less fortunate, including children. In 2002, this pledge was further concretized by promising the children of our world a better and brighter future free from malnutrition, preventable diseases, poverty, violence, sexual abuse and exploitation, forced labour and armed conflict.

CARICOM recognizes that a lot has been done and applauds the achievements in the years since 1990. We have seen a decline in global mortality rates for children under 5 years of age, which fell below 10 million in 2006 for the first time. The fight against preventable diseases has led to drastic declines in measles and polio infections. There has been improved access to safe water. We have witnessed improvement in early childhood development. We also commend the significant increase in primary school enrolment levels by some countries, as they strive to achieve the goal of universal primary education by 2015.

We can list many achievements in issues affecting children around the world and can be proud of the progress in our respective regions and countries. In the Caribbean region, we are on track to achieve four of the Millennium Development Goals, in the areas of poverty reduction, universal primary education, increase in gender parity in primary education and reduction in child and maternal mortality. Our region's significant achievements in the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS are also praiseworthy. Additionally, some of our countries have developed plans of action on children and have implemented national child protection legislation that aligns national laws with international standards.

The Caribbean has also taken initiatives to reduce child labour, as was noted in the report of the Secretary-General on the follow-up to the special session of the General Assembly on children (A/62/259), submitted for consideration during the sixty-second session.

We commend the work of UNICEF and its Executive Board towards the approval last June of the four-year multi-country programme for the Eastern Caribbean, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago. This programme will contribute to the support of public policies and investment that reflect the rights and priorities of children, increase protection, advance early childhood development, promote healthy life skills to reduce violence and prevent HIV/AIDS infection through scaling up the Health and Family Life Education (HFLE) programme. We look forward to the Agency's ongoing efforts and pledge the Region's full cooperation and support.

Five years later, we have arrived at a critical juncture. In assessing our progress in the implementation of "A world fit for children", where are we? Have we done enough to protect our children or are we on a path to witness yet another decade of great promises and modest achievements, like that of the 1990s?

While we recognize that progress has been achieved in some regions and countries, others are witnessing levels of progress too slow to meet our collectively agreed goals. In some cases, the situation has stagnated or worsened. If these circumstances are not reversed, then by 2015 an additional 4.6 million children will not survive to the age of five years, with sub-Saharan Africa being the most severely affected.

Today, 20 million children are severely malnourished and suffer from various preventable

diseases. The HIV/AIDS pandemic remains a global threat to the development, progress and stability of our societies. Exploitation of children is pervasive in all our societies, and violence and abuse against children remain a serious challenge. In this area alone, our efforts have not generated sufficient progress, and the results are mixed.

CARICOM is committed to the promotion and protection of the rights of children. Yet, like many other regions, we too are facing a number of challenges. Our region is characterized by socio-economic vulnerabilities and susceptibility to external economic factors. CARICOM heads of Government, therefore, in cooperation with the Community's ministerial councils such as the Ministerial Council on Human and Social Development, and through regional partnerships such as with the Pan-Caribbean Partnership against HIV/AIDS, are working diligently to develop effective social policies to address many of the challenges confronting the region, particularly in the area of HIV/AIDS, which is a major and pervasive threat to the survival of our young people in the future generation.

A world fit for children is a just and peaceful world. However, we cannot create a just and peaceful world if we do not, as a matter of priority, correct the growing inequities in income and the global trade regime which has negatively impacted small and vulnerable economies of the Caribbean.

If we assess our progress from the economic perspective, then it is clear that we have not done enough since 2002 and that we are not on track. I would say that the same is true if the analysis is done from a social development perspective. If we do not take all necessary measures now to address the pervasive, socio-economic disparities and challenges confronting developing countries, we will fail to provide a better and brighter future for our children.

The children of the world cannot wait and hope for us to do what we pledged to do in 1990 at the World Summit for Children, in 1995 at the World Summit for Social Development, in 2000 at the Millennium Summit and in 2002 at the twenty-seventh special session, on children. The time has come for us to strengthen both national resources and the capacity of developing countries' delivery systems to enable them to provide more effective basic social services, critical for children's survival, in line with the 20/20 initiative. We must improve technology and capacity-building for the collection, monitoring and analysis of quality data to support policy decisions and national development plans; we must create broader and more focused partnerships; and commitments from the international community must be increased and must bear fruit.

Official development assistance is still far short of what is needed for us to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and to provide essential investment in children. CARICOM, consequently, again calls on the international community and donor partners to take positive steps towards meeting the target of 0.7 per cent. CARICOM, equally, reiterates the call made by the Secretary-General, for donors to issue timelines for scaling up aid, in order to reach the targets by 2010 and 2015.

Finally, we cannot sufficiently underscore the critical need for successful conclusion of the Doha trade negotiations, which will go a long way in helping to meet national goals and objectives and thereby fulfil the promises we made to our children. Let us commit ourselves. Let us again say yes for children.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Antonio Milososki, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Mr. Milososki (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia): First of all, I will use the opportunity to express, on behalf of the Macedonian people, our deepest condolences with regard to the tragic terrorist events that took place in Algeria today and, on behalf of the Macedonian Government, the strongest condemnation of those violent acts.

We have gathered here to evaluate the progress achieved in the implementation of the Declaration and the Plan of Action (resolution S-27/2, annex) adopted at the special session on children of 2002 and to reaffirm our strong political commitment to making the world a place fit for children. Despite the remarkable positive developments inspired by this global process, guided by our desire to further protect the rights and well-being of children worldwide, many serious obstacles and challenges remain ahead of us.

Children in some regions are more negatively affected than in others. That requires our collective

mobilization. The reinvigorated joint efforts to implement the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are of crucial importance to the process of investing in children and guarding the best interests of the child. Inspired by this global process, Macedonia has made enormous efforts to improve the situation of children in our country. We have also joined forces with our regional partners, States and regional organizations in making a Europe fit for children.

My Government took an active part in a number of important regional conferences with the aim of contributing towards the achievement of the global goals set forth in the documents of the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly. These regional events reaffirmed the commitments of States undertaken globally in 2002 and recognized the importance to systematically measure the extent to which the rights of the child are effectively implemented and to establish comprehensive self-monitoring structures to measure and evaluate the achievements.

Let me briefly present the Macedonian experience in the implementation of the commitments of the special session on children of 2002. Last January, the Macedonian Government submitted a national progress report. The report was facilitated by a special event held in Skopje in June 2005 on the theme "A Country Fit for Children", organized by the Government of Macedonia and the UNICEF country office. This conference, the first of its kind in our region, brought together Government officials, mayors, experts, civil society members, academics and youth representatives to discuss children's issues. Its aim was to galvanize political commitment and accelerate action for children in Macedonia by ensuring that children's issues remained high on the political agenda of the country.

Our major achievements are: elaboration of the National Action Plan on Children; establishment of the National Commission on Children, the Parliamentary Working Group on Children and the Sub-Committee against Trafficking in Children; an improved reporting record on the Convention on the Rights of the Child; as well as ratification of the Optional Protocols to the Convention.

We have managed to decrease infant and mother mortality rates, to establish child-friendly hospitals and to reform the education and child protection system, and we have succeeded in eliminating iodine deficiency. We have a very committed civil society sector working on the promotion and protection of the rights of children in Macedonia.

Let me share a summary of lessons learned in the preparation of the national progress report and the initiatives undertaken since 2002. The obligations the Republic of Macedonia assumed under the document adopted in 2002 have triggered the wide mobilization of national capacities and resources in order to meet the set goals. The process of drafting and adopting the National Action Plan on Children, inspired by the world Plan of Action (see resolution S-27/2, annex), has increased the attention to children's needs and focused the activities of political decision makers. As a result, a number of important legislative and institutional reforms have taken place.

The problem of coordination will be overcome with new institutional structures, in particular with the establishment of the National Commission. Insufficiently developed budget planning has challenged the implementation of the National Action Plan and the world fit for children targets. Therefore, the Government wants to improve data collection and analysis. The identified shortcomings will serve as a basis to upgrade our policy in the area of the protection and promotion of the rights of the child.

The Macedonian Government is convinced that investment in children is the most valuable and rewarding investment in our common future. As such, it must remain a top priority for Governments and their partners. Our global movement to create a world fit for children must not be discouraged by setbacks, but further inspired by the visible progress achieved.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Ana Ligia Mixco Sol de Saca, First Lady and National Secretary for the Family of El Salvador.

Ms. Mixco Sol de Saca (El Salvador) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is an honour for me to address this world forum to reaffirm the commitment and the political will of the Government of El Salvador to continue implementing the principles, goals and strategies agreed upon in the Declaration and Plan of Action adopted at the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly, and entitled, "A world fit for children" (resolution S-27/2, annex). That session was called to renew the commitment to the health,

development and dignity of children worldwide. This goal draws us here today to review the progress achieved by countries in fulfilling those commitments.

The special session on children brought together the commitments undertaken in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, at the World Summit for Children and at the Millennium Summit. El Salvador identified itself with these endeavours and responsibly endeavoured to overcome the challenges to building a world fit for girls, boys and teenagers.

Poverty is one of the main obstacles to the effective protection and promotion of all of the rights of our children and their well-being. That is why one of the main goals of the El Salvador Government plan is the implementation of poverty eradication programmes. In this regard, I am proud to indicate that, in connection with meeting the goal of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, the targets related to the percentage of inhabitants with an income of less than one dollar per day and the incidence of extreme or critical poverty have been met.

But challenges remain, and we have successfully implemented the presidential Solidarity Network programme, which takes care of 200,000 families living in the poorest towns in rural El Salvador. This programme provides food, education and health care, empowers women and promotes gender equality, especially given the crucial role of women in strengthening the family and society as the main guides and guardians of children. Our aim is to comply with the relative poverty goals by the year 2015.

Through our National Secretariat for the Family, an institution over which I am honoured to preside, we have directly contributed — in coordination with other national entities, non-governmental organizations and the private sector — to meeting in recent years the challenges in health and education. Health is one of the main human development indicators, which is why it has high priority on the Government's agenda. This has allowed us to reach the goal of reducing the infant mortality rate, which has dropped to 24 per 1,000 live births and the child mortality rate, which has fallen to 6 per 1,000 live births.

All the children of El Salvador are entitled to universal and cost-free access to immunizations against diseases such as tuberculosis, tetanus, poliomyelitis and measles. With respect to the fight against the HIV/AIDS epidemic, we have strengthened health care services and systems through the effective and reliable supply of medications. One hundred per cent of pregnant mothers who so request are entitled to a free HIV test. This national strategy has resulted in a more than 85 per cent reduction in the number of children born with HIV.

We are convinced that one of the main tools to combat poverty is education, and we have developed actions to attain the goals of reaching universal primary education and eliminating gender disparities in education, through access of girls to education at similar or higher rates than boys. One of the tools for continued progress in this area is the Healthy School Programme. This is part of the Government's social policy and directly benefits more than 800,000 children living in the rural and marginal urban areas of the country, leading to their comprehensive well-being.

Our commitment to a world fit for children also entails the implementation of the Programa Ternura, or Caring Programme, begun in May 2006, which integrates inter-sectoral institutional efforts, with the support of the United Nations system. Our goal is to contribute to human security and enhance the living conditions of the Salvadoran families, particularly the living conditions of children, within the framework of the promotion, care, protection and advocacy of all of their rights. In that manner we uphold the Millennium Development Goals.

El Salvador has adapted its current legislation to the standards set forth in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols. We have also implemented a national policy for the comprehensive development of children and adolescents. This is a fundamental instrument to fulfil our regional and international commitments.

In the Declaration and Plan of Action "A world fit for children", United Nations Member States committed themselves to making the greatest effort to reduce and eliminate all forms of violence, exploitation, abuse, discrimination and disparities against children and adolescents. To that end, we have taken various steps and put in place programmes aimed at strengthening the family and promoting the values of unity, respect and peaceful coexistence.

Allow me to reaffirm the commitment of the Government of my husband, President Elías Antonio Saca, to make every effort to achieve the universal well-being of our girls, boys and adolescents. This

High-level Plenary Meeting provides us an opportunity to deliberate jointly and to listen to the voices and points of view of girls, boys and adolescents with regard to all the issues and problems that affect them by virtue of their age and level of maturity. The momentum provided by this Meeting will, in the near future, enable us to feel satisfied about our progress in the short and long term. We are all responsible for the well-being of children.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Moushira Khattab, Secretary-General of the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood of the Arab Republic of Egypt.

Mrs. Khattab (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I should like to express our heartfelt sympathy to the people of Algeria on today's bombings in Algiers.

Five years replete with developments have passed since the 2002 special session on children, whose outcome document (resolution S-27/2, annex) was entitled "A world fit for children". Experience has shown that our effective implementation of that document, along with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, can make a huge difference and can help to create a world more fit for children. As a whole, those two documents stand out as landmarks in addressing children's issues. However, despite the unprecedented international consensus generated by those documents, they cannot be implemented in isolation from a third critical document, namely, the independent expert's report on violence against children, transmitted to the General Assembly by the Secretary-General (A/61/299). Egypt contributed significantly during the preparation of those documents, and we have taken serious and pioneering steps to implement them at the national level and to adopt and promote them at the regional and international levels.

Many initiatives at the national level have been launched in Egypt, with strong support from its political leadership. The result has been that a rights-based approach has become a fact of life in my country. We are now working to ingrain such an approach in the minds of all Egyptians.

Egypt has withdrawn its reservations to articles 20 and 21 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We no longer have any reservations to any of the Convention's articles. We will continue to promote the full implementation of the Convention and its Optional Protocols.

In that regard and in implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Egypt has made great strides in reducing mother and child mortality rates. We have also completely eradicated poliomyelitis and tetanus contracted at childbirth and introduced the right to Egyptian nationality for children born to an Egyptian mother and a foreign father. On the basis of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood has launched a girls education initiative that has been considered a huge success by the international community. That programme is a model partnership between Government, civil society and seven United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, primarily UNICEF. In just three years, more than 800 schools have been built to educate thousands of girls. That experience led the expert Ronald Sultana, who was appointed by UNICEF to document the Egyptian experience, to say that it was a unique, inspiring initiative for education that had created a new generation of schools for a new generation of women — women who are educated and empowered, opting for their deserved place in society as partners in development on equal footing with men.

That ambitious strategy was solidly reinforced through steady funding by the Egyptian Government to address all issues related to childhood, primarily education, health, social integration and capacity-building. This pioneering experiment was implemented through a child-oriented budget.

As part of the same rights-based approach, Egypt has also made a significant breakthrough witnessed by the entire world: a drastic drop in the prevalence of female genital mutilation, which is now a criminal act under our laws. That practice is also condemned by the public and is no longer a part of the dominant culture. With the support of civil society, the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood has led a campaign to raise awareness among local communities and to mobilize public opinion against the practice. The participation of children and young people has been remarkable and strong. That has paved the way for change through a campaign under the theme "The beginning of the end", which was launched by First Lady Suzanne Mubarak. The campaign, which is gaining ground every day and which benefits from strong political and executive will, led to the second

Pan-African Forum on Children, which is part of Egypt's effort to end female genital mutilation in Africa. That effort includes an ambitious African plan focused on the advancement of African children.

On the basis of a rights-based approach to children's issues, we have redoubled our efforts to eliminate child labour, which violates a child's right to education and protection from violence and commercial exploitation. Moreover, it has become clear that having to live on the streets is in itself a violation of a child's rights, including the right to live within a family that provides protection, and to receive social services. In that connection, we are tirelessly attempting to expand services for disabled children and those with special needs. The issue of violence against children has also become a crime punishable by law. We have been working to adapt our legal code in that regard through a partnership process led by the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood, the Egyptian Government and civil society. The aim is to ensure that children enjoy all the rights stipulated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

To that end, we have raised the age for consent to marriage from 16 to 18 years for girls and the age of responsibility for a criminal act from 7 to 12 years of age. We have also made available all necessary care for children born out of wedlock. We have criminalized corporal punishment, female genital mutilation, trafficking in children and child sexual exploitation. We have also introduced a new juvenile justice system that is in line with the 10-year review of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and is based on justice reform, not punishment.

Egypt has made enormous efforts at the Arab and African levels, among which I would like to mention the following. In May 2001, Egypt hosted the Pan-African Conference on the Future of Children. In July of the same year, we also hosted a high-level Arab conference on the subject. Those meetings produced an Arab and African perspective in preparation for the drafting of "A world fit for children". In addition, Egypt also hosted this year's second African conference devoted to the five-year review of that document and a meeting that adopted an Egyptian initiative on Africa's role in the review of the document. Africa is proud to be the first continent to make such an effort. We have come to this High-level Plenary Meeting to urge accelerated efforts to implement the plan of action to make Africa fit for children that was introduced earlier today by Ghana's Minister of Women and Children's Affairs on behalf of the African Union.

Given the close link between women's and children's rights, Egypt is engaged on issues related to global and regional peace and security. In that connection, the Suzanne Mubarak Women's International Peace Movement has been established to promote peace and to empower women as peacemakers and as advocates for peace and security on behalf of children.

In the context of the 2006 study on violence against children (see A/61/299), Egypt has played a pivotal role as Chair of the steering committee for the Middle East and North Africa. We have hosted three conferences devoted to launching a regional dialogue on the study. That has led to an important achievement: the setting up of basic infrastructure to prohibit violence against children. This includes, among other things, the establishment of national committees to fight violence, the drafting of strategies, plans of action and monitoring mechanisms to monitor violence, the setting up of hotlines to save children and the establishment of offices to receive complaints.

The Egyptian National Council for Childhood and Motherhood has translated the complete study into Arabic and has distributed it in the Arab world, as the Arab world believes that that is an important step towards its implementation. We will host a follow-up Arab conference to be held at Arab League headquarters next month.

In closing, we understand that the road is still long, but what we have achieved on the national, regional, African and international levels supports our conviction that we are on the right path and that our efforts are not being impeded by a lack of awareness or will.

Let us agree to work together in close international cooperation and real partnership for a better future for our world, and for broad understanding that we are one world, where no minority must enjoy security, stability and peace without seriously taking into account the enormous majority that is dying of hunger, thirst, illiteracy and disease.

Let there be peace for all, as well as justice, stability and security. Let there be peace for our children — always and everywhere.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency The Honourable Margaret Nasha, Minister of Local Government of Botswana.

Ms. Nasha (Botswana): In addressing the Declaration and Plan of Action on "A world fit for children" (resolution S-27/2, annex), Botswana made a time-bound commitment based on the eight agreed goals for children and young people. All the activities, objectives and targets pertaining to the Declaration on "A world fit for children" have been incorporated into our national and district development plans, in conformity with our National Vision 2016.

Botswana ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1995 and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child in 2001. We are committed to upholding child rights as stipulated in the Convention and consistent with the principle of the best interests of the child for Botswana's current and future children. In our effort to harmonize our domestic laws with the provisions and principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international conventions, we reviewed our country's Children's Act and as a result a more comprehensive children's bill is currently being drafted with the help of UNICEF-Botswana.

Other pieces of legislation which have been amended include, among others, the Marriage Act, which was amended to raise the age of marriage from 16 to 21 years for both boys and girls. The Marriage Act further makes the registration of all custom-based and religious marriages compulsory, in order to guard against early marriages for girl children.

Registration of births and deaths has been compulsory in Botswana for many years now. What we are now endeavouring to do through the Children's Act Amendment Bill is to make it mandatory for all children to have the names of their fathers written on their birth certificates, irrespective of whether or not those fathers are married to the mothers of those children. The issue here is that every child has the right to an identity.

Prior to the advent of HIV/AIDS, Botswana was well on course towards eradicating tuberculosis and significantly reducing child, infant and maternal mortality. Botswana's efforts to combat HIV/AIDS are well documented in the report of the Executive Director of UNICEF. This disease has indeed reversed our fortunes over the years. Over and above our documented efforts to save the lives of those infected with HIV/AIDS and to prevent the infection of unborn babies, the focus of attention has now turned to preventing the spread of the disease. The fact that more and more young people undergo voluntary testing for HIV/AIDS offers a glimmer of hope for the survival of future generations in our country.

Botswana's biggest area of concern in connection with Millennium Development Goal 2 has to do with the provision of early childhood education and learning. Only 17 per cent of pre-school-age children have access to early childhood education, and the majority of those children come from middle and higher income families who can afford the fees. Otherwise, primary education has been free to all for some years now.

We have taken concrete steps through legislation and public education to guard against early marriages and all forms of violence against children.

We owe it to our children to make this world a safe place for them. In this regard, nothing, not even culture or customs, should be used as an excuse to violate children. As a woman, I know best that culture has been and continues to be used widely as an excuse to marginalize women. But we are old enough to speak out for ourselves. On the other hand, most of these children cannot do the same. They need us to speak out for them and with them, to ensure that they are protected against all forms of abuse and exposure to harmful practices which we have to do away with sooner rather than later.

We need to mount a serious and open education campaign to end the practice of female genital mutilation and impress upon Member States the need to introduce laws that will deal with the problem convincingly. And I believe that our menfolk should be meaningfully involved in this campaign so that it will not be viewed just as yet another situation of women crying in the wilderness. The practice has no clinical value. It is not sanctioned by any religion. All it does is inflict unbearable pain on young girls and subject them to lifelong trauma and depression.

In an effort to realize children's right to participation, we in Botswana envisage, in our draft

Children's Bill, the establishment of a national council which will oversee children's issues at the national level. The Bill also provides for the establishment of the Children's Consultative Forum, which will be led by children's representatives from all districts. We are determined not to make the Children's Consultative Forum a token entity. We will endeavour to use the Forum to meaningfully consult children on all decisions that affect them, starting with the draft Children's Bill itself. It will be the duty of the National Children's Council to ensure that the Forum is convened on a regular basis. This requirement is indeed included in the law in order to make sure that the Forum is convened regularly and stays focused. An annual report on its work will be submitted to parliament by my ministry.

In conclusion, on behalf of the Government of Botswana, I would like to thank our stakeholders, such as the civil society organizations, development partners and the private sector, for their unwavering support on children's programmes and projects.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency The Honourable Marlene Mungunda, Minister of Gender Equality and Child Welfare of Namibia.

Ms. Mungunda (Namibia): Namibia too would like to join those who expressed their condolences and solidarity to Algeria for this morning's tragic events.

It is a special honour for my delegation to be accorded this opportunity to address the General Assembly on this very important topic — children — an issue that is of great concern to all Member States. The report of the Secretary-General before us (A/62/259) shows that many countries have taken concrete steps to make this world a better place for children in the fields of health, nutrition, education and protection. That is a very encouraging development indeed.

At the outset, I should like to thank the President of the Economic and Social Council and the Executive Director of UNICEF for their thoughtful remarks and to express my appreciation for the voice of the African boy, who called for honesty and real action and who asked us to listen with our hearts.

The Namibian constitution enshrines the rights of children to life, health, education and a decent standard of living. The Government of the Republic of Namibia is signatory to a number of international instruments and conventions, which shows the seriousness of our commitment to safeguarding the nation's future leaders and citizens. We have adopted the Combating of Domestic Violence Act, the Child Maintenance Act, the Combating of Rape Act and the Children's Status Act, and the Child Care and Protection Bill will be introduced soon.

We recognize that quality education directly contributes to human development, capacity and productivity. In that context, Namibia has made great progress in making education effective, compulsory at the primary level and accessible to all. Namibia is on the right track in its efforts to reach the global Millennium Development Goal target of universal primary education. Enrolment rates have been growing steadily since 2001. Gender parity, a hallmark of Namibia's primary education system, remains slightly biased in favour of female students.

Namibia has also made great strides in ensuring that orphans attend school. Therefore, primary education, in theory, is free for those who cannot afford it. Article 38 of the Education Act of 2001 provides that

> "All tuition provided for primary and special education in state schools, including all schoolbooks, educational materials and other related requisites, must be provided free of charge to learners until the seventh grade, or until the age of 16 years, whichever occurs first".

All primary and secondary schools implement HIV/AIDS life-skills programmes, which provide young people with facts about sexual health and reproduction, teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, as well as attempting to improve their communication skills.

However, despite improvements in access to education, no external shock has as much potential to slow down or even reverse the recent gains in primary enrolment as the advance of HIV/AIDS. The epidemic's impact on students and educators is as complex as it is devastating. The school dropout rate as a result of the spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and other health factors is high.

The number of children orphaned by HIV/AIDS also continues to grow. It is estimated that by 2021 Namibia will have more than 250,000 orphans, who

will account for one third of its under-15 population. Three quarters of those children will have been orphaned by AIDS. As the number of AIDS victims continues to rise, an increasing number of children will grow up without parental love and care, deprived of their basic rights to shelter, health, food and education and facing the threats of violence, abuse and exploitation.

The Government of the Republic of Namibia has formulated national policies and strategies on HIV/AIDS, including the National Plan of Action for Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children, which are being implemented with a focus on prevention, care and support. These programmes need additional resources if they are to be able to make a greater impact on our societies. Mitigating the socio-economic impact of the pandemic is another area that warrants further investment. The Government is providing social grants to orphans and vulnerable children on a monthly basis.

Finally, we believe in the important role that the United Nations system can play in safeguarding the interests of children everywhere. Indeed, Namibia believes in the common goal of creating a world fit for children and has integrated the commitments set out in "A world fit for children" (resolution S-27/2, annex) into its existing national development programmes and poverty reduction strategies. Namibia is also continuously striving to achieve the goals set out in the Millennium Declaration (resolution 55/2).

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Göran Hägglund, Minister for Health and Social Affairs of Sweden.

Mr. Hägglund (Sweden): Today, children are living in a time of great change, opportunities and challenges. New phenomena are challenging children as well as adults. These days, children know much more and learn very quickly about what is going on around them — but also about things that are happening far away. They live in the real world and the virtual world at one and the same time. It is our responsibility to make sure that this enriches and brightens their childhood and does not instead shorten, complicate or threaten their safety or their very lives. Regrettably, many children in the world also face poverty, the scourge of HIV/AIDS, armed conflict and other forms of violence.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child provides important support for children in these times of rapid change. We see the Convention as a minimum level, a baseline. In many areas, we can achieve more. The goal of our welfare policy is to guarantee to all girls and boys a good start in life. The main responsibility for the care and upbringing of children lies with their parents or other guardians. Society has to support the parents so as to guarantee good and secure conditions in which children can grow up. The family is considered the primary unit of society, and parenting has an essential role for the future of society. A safe and healthy family life is of crucial importance for the well-being of children and of society as a whole.

It is important that decision-makers and other adults listen to children, take them seriously and make sure that they are included as much as possible in decisions that affect them. A good dialogue with children is something in which we engage far too rarely. We decision makers have a language of our own. We leave little room for children's questions or suggestions, and we rarely or never get back to children to tell them what we have done regarding their points of view. We still have much to learn in this area.

Yesterday, I had the privilege of taking part in a meeting of children's ombudsmen from all over the world. Sweden believes that children's ombudsmen have a very important role to play in enabling us to fulfil the joint undertakings that we made in 2002. We would like to encourage countries that have not yet established a children's ombudsman to take advantage of that option.

The Millennium Declaration, the Millennium Development Goals, the Plan of Action set out in "A world fit for children" and the Convention on the Rights of the Child are cornerstones of Sweden's international development cooperation. That cooperation is based on a rights perspective and on the perspectives of poor people regarding their own development.

Development must be equitable and will not be sustainable unless children's best interests and capabilities are taken into account. All our development cooperation must place a greater focus on child protection and on girls' and boys' participation. Violence against children can never be justified and all

forms of violence and abuse must be combated and must be prevented.

It has been against the law for almost 30 years in Sweden for parents to hit their children. Other countries, though regrettably far too few, have followed our example. The picture that emerges from the United Nations study is frightening. All over the world, children are still being subjected to violence and abuse. We must all act together to put a stop to all that. We must work for a shared vision of zero tolerance; no child is to be subjected to violence.

International organizations should encourage and help their member countries to abolish all forms of violence against children in all contexts, including in the family. Politicians, teachers, religious leaders, the mass media and opinion-makers should all contribute to abolishing the violence that affects our children.

Sweden welcomes the decision to appoint a special representative of the Secretary-General in the work to combat violence against children. We are convinced that the special representative will be able to coordinate efforts at the international level.

Sweden appreciates the work being done by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) around the world. The work of UNICEF is making a difference to children's everyday lives. We can all find valuable questions and useful answers in the down-to-earth studies that the Innocenti Research Centre produces in such a professional way. We also recognize with appreciation the work of the United Nations Development Fund for Women and others that focus on promoting gender equality and combating all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child.

Much of the world will soon be celebrating Christmas and a new year – a holiday season characterized by generosity and hope for the future. Above all, it is a time for children. We politicians and decision-makers should keep the focus on children even after the holidays. We should constantly seek direct contact with children and ask them what we can do for them and what we and they can do together. Our vision is for every country to be a place where every girl and boy gets the best imaginable start in life.

Sweden will continue to be a trustworthy partner in our continued work to build a world fit for children.

The Acting President: I give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Priya Manickchand, Minister of Human Services and Social Security of Guyana.

Ms. Manickchand (Guyana): We join with the rest of the international community in offering our heartfelt sympathies to the people and Government of Algeria and, indeed, to all humankind. We have seen yet another attack on humanity.

We also recognize the statement made by the Honourable Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs of the Bahamas on behalf of the Caribbean Community.

The delegation of the Republic of Guyana, which includes three children, is delighted to participate in this high-level meeting to review the progress of our collective efforts to create a world fit for children. On behalf of the Government and people of Guyana, I extend special greetings to all child representatives and commend them for their invaluable contribution to this year's review process.

The care, protection and development of all our children, in whom lies the future of humanity, are objectives that demand pride of place on our national and global agendas. Guyana stands committed to those objectives. We welcome the opportunity to share our experiences in implementation and to exchange ideas on the ongoing process of transforming our world into one fit for children.

Since the 2002 special session on children, the Government of Guyana has taken several initiatives to enhance the well-being of our country's children and to ensure that their rights are protected. We have succeeded in reducing child mortality, while increasing the immunization of children against vaccine-preventable diseases; immunization currently stands at 92 per cent. Success has been achieved in preventing mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS, even as efforts have been enhanced in the provision and distribution, free of charge, of locally produced anti-retroviral drugs to those infected with HIV/AIDS. There are ongoing efforts to provide quality education to children in Guyana and, while we have achieved universal primary education, concentration is now focused on the attainment of universal secondary education and ensuring the completion of that grade of education by boys and girls alike.

The principle of the best interests of the child guides Guyana's jurisprudence as it relates to legislation on children. To date, we have enshrined in our Constitution the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which provides the framework for promoting healthy lives, combating HIV/AIDS, providing quality education for all and protecting children against abuse, exploitation and violence.

It is disheartening to note the level of violence in many societies globally. For our part, we have embarked on a campaign to stamp out violence in our society, particularly violence against women and children. That matter is currently the subject of extensive national consultations on the basis of proposals by the Government to reform the law, strengthen protection and improve support and services to victims, while upholding the right of the defendant to a fair trial. Earlier this year, a Child Protection Service was established. The Government of Guyana continues to actively collaborate with UNICEF under the country programme of cooperation 2006-2010 to tackle child protection and welfare issues.

Implementing a world fit for children has not been without challenges and setbacks, some of which are greater than those occasioned by financial and infrastructural constraints. Children across the world are at risk of further suffering on account of the global increase in food and fuel prices and in the cost of living. With internal and domestic conflicts and wars among countries, the innocence and rights of childhood are stolen. More needs to be done to address the scourge of poverty. More needs to be done to protect children from exposure to conflict situations, as well as to provide for their rehabilitation and reintegration into post-conflict societies.

Preserving the natural environment for posterity is an important dimension of creating a world fit for children. As reports by the Nobel Prize-winning Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change make clear, human actions are impacting the kind of world our children will inherit. Renowned economist Nicholas Stern has highlighted that those who will suffer most are the developing countries, which have contributed the least to greenhouse gas emissions.

Vulnerability can be considered in terms of geographic location and economy, as well as age. In the developed and developing countries alike, it is the children who are most vulnerable. Where climate change leads to disasters, destruction and death, children suffer the most. Many become orphans; many become disabled; many become displaced. Their health is affected, their education is affected, and their entire life is turned upside down.

Global warming and consequent climate change must be addressed. Guyana has taken a leadership role in that effort. Our pristine rainforest does much service to the world in terms of carbon sequestration. The post-Kyoto Protocol framework should make provisions for standing rainforests with mechanisms for rewarding countries for conserving those rainforests.

From this rostrum, we appeal to world leaders, and indeed all adults, to do everything they can to avoid the road to self-destruction and move our planet onto a path of recovery through massive reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. It will make little sense if we manage to eradicate violence against children on one day and they drown in a mighty flood or starve in a drought or famine on the next. We therefore stress the need for a coherent and comprehensive approach to issues concerning children.

Guyana looks forward to sharing further insights on its national experiences in the round table sessions in order to contribute to an elaboration of best practices with a view to establishing and sustaining a world fit for children.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.